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My Beautiful

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My Beautiful

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth
University.

by

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Artist Statement

In creating my work I use bold, bright colors and fundamental shapes and patterns. My images reflect how I view the world and genuinely express my imagination, feelings, and thinking. Working this way allows me to apply a symbolic face to personal concerns, beliefs, fears, ideologies, and philosophies. I see a world where life and art blend to create images of triumph and tragedy, joy and pain, or growth and change.

My ideas have grown from the desire to understand myself as a woman, as a Christian, and as a unique individual. Dealing with personal questions, I explore the varying relationships between popular culture and self-perception. Another source for my work are philosophical themes, along with political and social commentary. I want my messages to not only touch the heart and soul of people but convey a message that they will remember.

My Beautiful

Introduction

When I was about ten years old I recall that my brother, who was a model student, had been asked by a teacher to enter an art contest. Excited with the possibility of winning a prize, my brother agreed to participate but wanted my assistance. I agreed and ended up doing the entire piece for which he won first place. It wouldn't be until later that I would come to realize the impact that this event would have on my self-perception. My childhood interest in art grew and offered me an opportunity to excel. It didn't matter whether it was through hands-on activities, dance, or creative ideas; my inner artist had begun to emerge.

In college, I majored in fine arts and looked towards obtaining a degree in studio art. Upon graduation, I secured a teaching job to allow myself time to thoroughly think through my plans and to gain work experience. My first teaching position was as a fifth grade departmentalized teacher, where each teacher teaches two or three subjects. In this position, I taught mathematics, health, and science. The following year, I taught a self-contained second grade class where I was responsible for teaching all core content areas. During that year, my students had the opportunity to work with an Interrelated Art teacher once a quarter. The Interrelated Art teacher created art lessons centered on the core courses' goals and expectations in an effort to make art connections, while supporting and reinforcing what was taught in the classroom. I can remember how my students would get excited and loved having the opportunity to make art with a real artist. I would watch her teach and as the year progressed I would begin to get more

involved and would join in with the lessons using this as my own opportunity to express myself and fall back in love with art.

At the conclusion of that school year, I realized that I liked teaching but missed art so I applied and was hired as an interrelated art teacher. Then, I decided to reenter academia. However, my master's degree in education was obtained primarily for job security. Later, I was attending an art teacher workshop and began talking with a colleague who had recently graduated from the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). As we discussed the program and his experience, I was intrigued and began to look into the program.

My plans to go back and get a master's in art had been on hold so I decided to take two classes at VCU to help me decide if this was the place and program for me. I remember vividly my anxiety about creating art again after so long. I was especially nervous because I did not know what to expect from my classes. Having taught for several years, I had begun to see myself as only a teacher and not as an artist. Despite the fact that I hadn't put brush to canvas or ink to paper, I had been collecting pictures, drawing sketches, laying out collages, and coming up with color schemes. My final decision to enter the program was based on three primary factors. First, I wanted to create a source for financial growth and career advancement within the educational system. Secondly, I wanted a program which allowed me to work and go to school with minimum interruption to my lifestyle. Lastly, I wanted to reconnect with the field I felt passionate about.

Aesthetics

I entered the MIS-IAR Program with a clear understanding as to why I was going back to school but my creative direction was unclear. So, I began to look through old sketch books and art pieces and concluded that my desire to express my opinion could serve as a launching pad for my ideas. Working this way has allowed me to have tangible means of addressing questions, concerns, and life choices. My themes and motifs are representations of things that are significant to me. They reveal the beautiful, the ugly, and the important moments of my life. Centering my work on myself is highly subjective but is a way to tell my story to an audience that shares or would like to share my views and experiences.

The artwork I create contains both abstract and figurative elements that share a variety of motifs. I chose to explore the range and richness of the African American experience, particularly the experience of women because I am an African American woman. My images of these women portray strength, poise, sophistication, and other affirming qualities. In addition to literal subject matter, I also explore the formal and symbolic qualities of color, shape, and texture. For example, I may manipulate scale to show importance, or use texture to draw the viewer's attention.

In my work I bring together natural forms, cultural iconography, and media to create visual narratives. I primarily employ techniques and media ranging from printmaking and painting to collage. The first things that I decide on concern the media, composition, and color scheme. I typically start with a sketch or a collage and later transfer the imagery to canvas or paper. I take liberties when transferring the collage elements as a further way of exploring the particular idea. This approach helps me

choose the media and serves as an outline for the overall process I will take in completing the piece.

Artist Influences

As an undergraduate I had two professors, Dr. Leo F. Twiggs (1934-) and Dr. Terry K. Hunter (1950-), who have had a lasting impact on me due to the fact they took a personal interest in me and my growth as an artist. Twiggs developed the Fine Arts Department at South Carolina State University and was the first African American student to receive a Doctorate of Arts Education from the University of Georgia. Hunter received his PhD in art education at Florida State University and throughout the years has worked as an artist, educator, graphic designer, arts advocate, and arts administrator.

Dr. Twiggs creates batik paintings on muslin that are layered with dyes and inks. His layering of color creates independent images that appear to overlap one another as can be seen in his painting *Humble Beginnings* “2006”. This layering adds to the complexity of his pieces. His layering and use of texture served as a point of departure for my own collages and monotypes. In his approach, he begins by applying wax to the surface of cloth, usually silk or cotton, and dipping it in a cold water dye solution. The waxed areas resist the dye and the process is repeated many times to achieve multi-layers of different colors. When the waxed areas are crushed, dyes seep into them creating the characteristic crackle of batik. The wax is removed to uncover the many layers of colors.

I have translated his process into my own work with the use of stencils and other

materials, such as lace, natural found objects, and buttons. Ink is laid down onto the support surface and stencils are placed on top of the ink followed by another layer of ink. Another way I have translated his layering is by embossing objects into the paper which is then printed with the addition of watercolor pencils or pastels. The softness of the pencils and pastels make it easier to notice the embossments. I have also embossed and printed on magazine images and later used them to create collages.

Dr. Hunter uses a wide range of techniques in his work. For instance, his works range from colored to monochromatically-toned lithographs, serigraphs, and mixed media drawings, *The Grid Turns The Corner* his traveling retrospective of drawings and prints is a great example. In *Tellievision: Details Next!* "1996" you see a monochromatic well designed composition translating layers of imagery. He creates these strong compositions where your eye is drawn to something that grabs your attention, but it also wants to lead your eye around the whole painting, to take in everything. He does this through the strong lines and basic shapes in the composition, the structure underlying the details which are influenced by comic books, magazine images, and comedic social commentary. Hunter introduced me to the research side of art, the reasons why and how to investigate a subject matter in order to better present it visually.

The painters Mickalene Thomas (1971-) and Chitra Ganesh (1975-) have influenced the way I address my subject matter. Both artists create paintings that explore the definition and notions of beauty and women. Mickalene Thomas' large works are paintings or photographs which depict the subjects looking out at the viewer. These figures are set off against patchwork backgrounds, which inspired me to create works where the background intertwines with the foreground and the figures within the

work as she has done. Her depictions of African American women explore a spectrum of black female beauty and sexual identity while constructing images of femininity and power. Thomas' collage-inspired painting *Din, une très belle négresse #2* "2012" is a testament to her creative ability to use various materials like rhinestones, enamel, and colorful acrylics on untraditional surfaces in a unique and successful way.

Ganesh addresses Indian culture and mythology by using collage, assemblage, and digital manipulation. Her work examines historical narratives, allowing suppressed histories and mythologies to emerge. *Bhopal Looking Back* "2001" is one of many I have drawn inspiration from because of her approach in choosing imagery from political, economical, societal, and personal life experiences.

Working in Acrylic

I like to use acrylic paint because of its versatility, its drying time, it's convenient clean up, and I am comfortable with its fluidity. Normally, I begin with washes similar to traditional watercolor techniques. This allows me to lay out a number of thin washes over one another without fear of disturbing the colors underneath. This process was used when painting *Life Saver* (Appendix, 1). In this painting, I depicted a water scene to symbolize the relationship change that occurred between my sister and myself after the birth of her daughter. After the birth, my niece, my sister, and I became closer and because of this I chose to convey this change as a water scene mimicking a baptism, a Christian symbol of change and rebirth.

To create this feeling of renewal and new beginnings, I depicted my niece as a baby in the lower right foreground of the image. She is large in scale and creates a

focal point and implies the tie that binds my sister and me together. In the left center of the canvas, I placed two clasping hands surrounded by a gold life raft and wrist watches. The clasping hands represent my sister and me. The life raft represents emotional support and the watches represent the past, present, and future. The pair of hands reaching down from the upper left-hand corner symbolizes how we have learned to help one another in our times of need. I painted another pair of hands in the upper right-hand corner. These hands are painted in values of gray to reference the fact that we don't live in black or white and that every situation won't have a right or wrong answer. But if we learn to compromise and find a balance we can live our best life.

In the book *Murals, Walls that Sing* (2003), the author and artist George Ancona, states that "there are always new issues or changes that a mural can celebrate. So artists see a blank wall as an opportunity to paint a mural that will sing out the story of the people in the neighborhood" (Ancona, 47). I agreed with this statement and saw my canvases as formats for telling stories of my neighborhood. I recognized that beauty and self-confidence are intrinsically linked and I decided to create a piece about this connection. In *Lip Service* (Appendix, 2) I address the variety of skin color and associated biases within the African American community. This painting was developed over time by building up thin, transparent layers of color that eventually became opaque. This allows the paint layers to develop in a smooth and even manner. I chose to employ this technique because I wanted to make a connection and a comparison to the subtlest of modern day racism. One of the ways racism is displayed is through visual and racial representations in terms of what is supposedly acceptable. For example, a store clerk checking only the bags of African American and Hispanic

customers for shoplifting or monitoring them as they shop in the store, in my opinion. is a form of racism based on one's race or skin color. However, this same store clerk sees another African American or Hispanic who is dressed in business attire and does not monitor them because they percept that they are not a threat. Another example is found during the period of American slavery. Traditionally, slaves were divided into two categories: house or field slave. The house slave was normally fair-skinned and the field slave was dark-skinned, thus creating a general public sensibility in regards to skin tone and the natural color, texture, and appearance of the skin.

In *Lip Service* I painted a large-scaled face of a fair-skinned African American woman and positioned it in the center. This was done to draw the viewer's attention there first by implying that the figure is saying *I am better, look at me*. In a much smaller scale, part of the torso and arm of a dark-skinned African American woman is positioned in the upper right-hand side, referring to the lack of her importance and favorability. Next, I painted an upside down Caucasian woman with green skin undertones in the lower right. I chose green undertones as a symbol for the seed of bias planted during slavery as is stated in *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (2008), these "images of blacks by whites reveal far more about whites than about blacks, but the realities of power cause them to affect the blacks harmfully" (Harris, 37). This was the reasoning I used for painting the cigarette, which refers to the damage the biases have had on the African American community's unity.

Another piece that explores perception is *Polished* (Appendix, 3). In the lower right of the painting there are three different nail polish bottles. The bottle tops are

painted with dark blue tones while the bottoms of the bottles are magenta and purple. To mimic bricks, the bottles have been stacked on top of one another in reference to the building of a wall which represents isolation or division. The nail polish also depicts masking, in other words what you see versus what's actually real. I wanted the polish to appear shiny so I used different acrylic gels. This technique allowed the area to dry with a slick surface finish. These media were also used on the closed eye in the upper left corner which is located partly on top of the third nail polish bottle, the bamboo, and the woman's hair. Similar to *Lip Service*, the woman looks out at the viewer inferring her confidence. I chose to include bamboo because as I read the book *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (2003), my understanding of why some slaves were hit or beaten with sticks was broaden. I wanted to acknowledge their resilience in taking things meant for harm and using them positively. As an example, after the banning of drums, Africans turned to bamboo, cut to different lengths, and beat on the ground to create music.

Music has represented triumph and the reinvention of the self within the African American community which is why I love to dance. Dance is the inspiration for the painting *Inspire* (Appendix, 4). Inspire is the name of the dance group a friend and I founded. While painting it, I found that the acrylic was drying faster than I wanted it to and was leaving unwanted hard edges. So, I dampened the support surface before the paint was applied and used a brush dampened with water to keep the paint wet while I manipulated it. I used one brush to apply the paint and immediately softened the edge with the other brush that had been dampened with the water. I also used a spray bottle of water to dampen the surface as I painted. It was important to me that the dancer's

dress gave the illusion of subtle lace and tooling textures, keeping the surface wet allowed me to create this effect.

Working in Printmaking

My familiarity with printmaking during my undergraduate studies prompted me to explore the process in the MIS-IAR Program. I work primarily with monoprinting because it is more directly connected to the original sketch and it combines the spontaneous quality of painting with the impression of a print. The process I used on *Apple Pear* (Appendix, 5) began with an initial sketch drawn onto Plexiglas using watercolor pencils and permanent markers. Once the sketch was complete, color was painted onto the plate using inks and pastels. Lastly, the Plexiglas image was transferred onto a sheet of paper by means of pressure and a unique, one-of-a-kind image was produced.

Apple Pear was inspired by the jeans company, Apple Bottoms. This is a line of pants created for women with full-figured buttocks. In the print, the woman has a pear-shaped body with wide hips, large breasts, and a small waist line. The heavily painted complementary colors, red and green, accentuate these features. I positioned her head turned to the right. I drew this gesture to display her discomfort with others looking at her. This implies her disapproval with her physical build.

In the print, *Let Me* (Appendix, 6), gesturing and posing was used again to convey a message. Because African American women are often characterized as angry, this monotype was created to confront this stereotype. Even Michelle Obama, our First Lady, has been given this title a time or two. So, I painted simplified details of

a female form as a black outline to accentuate the pose. The figure was then colored in using watercolor pastels in a loose and gestural application. I mimicked the coloring marks of a child to convey freedom of expression. When looking at this piece I want the viewer to wonder why is she posed like that, is she talking, listening, yelling, or cursing someone out?

The amount of printing pressure can change the dynamics of an image, in V3 (Appendix, 7) I added more pressure in the printing process. This allowed the ink to blend, bleed, and soak into the paper creating a rough texture. In this piece, I wanted to explore the belief that women in the Middle East are submissive and suppressed. Make-up was heavily applied to the eyes and the face was uncovered. These things are typically not done and are seen as a depiction of uprising and protest. By placing the woman's *rajah* (the headscarf worn by Muslim women) underneath her chin, I address the misconceptions of submissiveness surrounding women who wear them. The *rajah* is worn to honor their race, gender, culture, and political beliefs.

Bloom Where (Appendix, 8) was inspired by an Essence magazine cover and employs a technique called chine colle. In this technique, bits of paper and fabric are placed onto the printing plate with glue on the exposed side. Once run through the press, the pressure will cause the added paper and fabric to adhere to the paper support. In this case, the woman in the chine colle piece is positioned in the center of the image to indicate it as the focal point. Flowers are painted around her with a few lightly painted on the left side of her face creating a connection to the background. I gave this piece its title because I believe that people can grow and become productive. It doesn't matter where you come from or your current situation In life, because we all

have something beautiful to share with the world.

I try to share my faith through my work. One of my attempts, *My Help Comes* (Appendix, 9) combines media and processes to create a monotype where stenciling, painting, and collage have been used. This rich, vibrant, full of life painting abounds with bright colors depicting rhythm, emotion, and an ecstatic vision of prayer. The female face, on the right half of the composition, was a stenciled cutout I made from an earlier monotype. Acrylic paint and water-based inks were used to hide the collaged edges. The acrylic paint was applied thickly to give the piece a tactile sensuousness. Through the use of texture, shape, line, and color, I intended the piece to convey warmth and comfort. It is inspired by my belief in prayer and the Psalm 121:2 which states “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2, NCV).

Creating themed works associated with my ethnicity and society has helped me better understand my cultural heritage. I think of my works as interpretations that mainly demonstrate women’s everyday struggles in life. It is my purpose to show the cultural diversity of women and the ways in which they may be the same. Working with these subject matters retains my attention, allows me to explore preconceived notions, and drives me to experiment with the art making processes of painting and printmaking.

My stylized manner frequently presents nostalgic, idealized views of the African American experience and urban images. In the process of creating I am able to get some distance from a situation, organize my thoughts and imagination, see options, and work out solutions to problems. Because of this, I am able to challenge my cognitive and critical thinking while developing my artistic skills which directly affects my passion

for creating art. To me, art is more than creating a pretty picture it is a reflection of the heart, the mastery of imperfection, the sentimental cues of life, and the beautiful.

Conclusion

The MIS-IAR Program provided me with the opportunity to take interesting and informative courses. Through these courses, I was exposed to new media and approaches and I have gained more experience in art making. Exploring new materials and fresh subject matter has also heighten my sensitivity to the feelings of my students and has helped me become a more skilled educator. Through my work I have tried to explore themes, materials, and processes. I've also tried to develop my artistic voice, a voice I want heard with a new artistic commitment and authenticity.

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Appendix

List of Figures

- Figure 1. *Life Saver*, acrylic on canvas, 20"x16", 2007.
- Figure 2. *Lip Service*, acrylic on canvas, 39¼"x 27½", 2010.
- Figure 3. *Polished*, acrylic on canvas, 36"x 24", 2010.
- Figure 4. *Inspire*, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20", 2009.
- Figure 5. *Apple Pear*, monotype, 12"x12", 2008.
- Figure 6. *Let Me*, monotype, 9½ "x 7½", 2008.
- Figure 7. *V3*, monotype, 10"x 8", 2008.
- Figure 8. *Bloom Where*, monotype, 10½ x 8", 2008.
- Figure 9. *My Help Comes*, mixed media, 4" x 6", 2008.



Figure 1. Life Saver, acrylic on canvas, 20"x 16", 2007.



Figure 2. Lip Service, acrylic on canvas, 39¼"x 27½", 2010.



Figure 3. Polished, acrylic on canvas, 36"x 24", 2010.



Figure 4. Inspire, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20", 2009.



Figure 5. Apple Pear, monotype, 12"x 12", 2008.

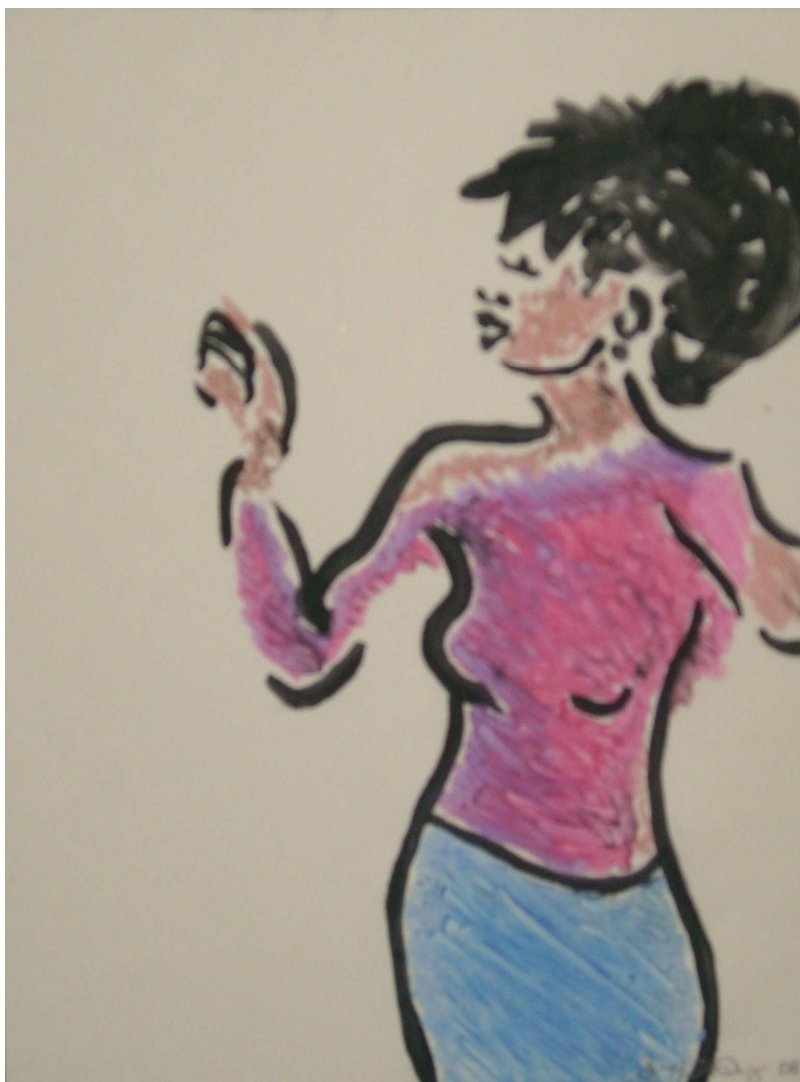


Figure 6. Let Me, monotype, 9½"x 7½", 2008.

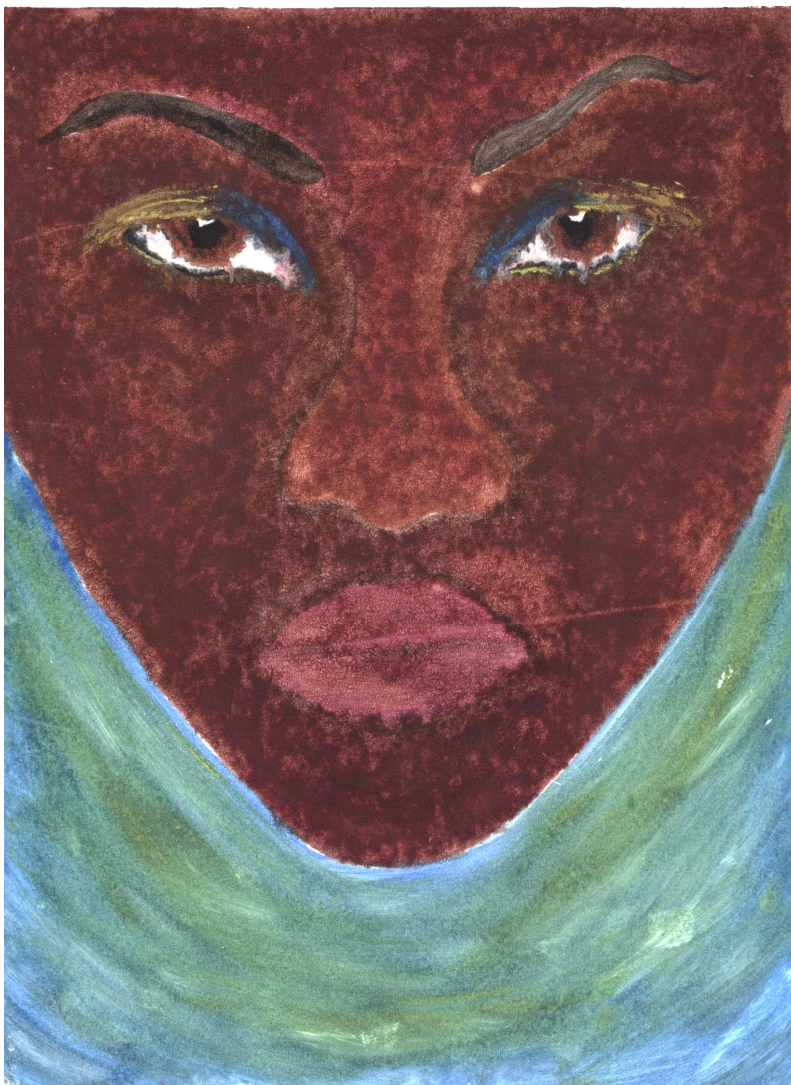


Figure 7. V3, monotype, 10 "x 8", 2008.



Figure 8. Bloom Where, monotype, 10½ x 8", 2008.



Figure 9. My Help Comes, mixed media, 4" x 6", 2008.

Jacquetta Harvey

EDUCATION

- 2013 Candidate Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art,
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Concentration: Printmaking and Painting
- 2005 Master of Education, American InterContinental University, Hoffman, IL
Major: Instructional Technology
- 2000 Bachelor of Art, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC
Major: Fine Arts/Printmaking Minor: Marketing

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2002-Pres. Interrelated Art Teacher, Skyline, Avalon, Morningside, Glassmanor and
Princeton Elementary, Prince George's County Public School System, MD
- 2006 Visual Art Teacher, Maryland Summer Centers Program for Upper
Chesapeake, MD Gifted and Talented Students, Washington College,
Chestertown, MD
- 2001-02 Classroom Teacher, J. Frank Dent Elementary, Prince George's County
Public School System, MD

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 2009 Juror, Friendly High School Art Show, Chestnut Oaks Condos, Ft.
Washington, MD
- 2009 Chaperon, Education First Tours, Ernest E. Just Middle School, Largo,
MD
- 2007 Exchange Student, International Artists and Teachers Exchange, Naples,
Italy
- 2007 Teacher Participant, Maryland Artist Teacher Institute, College Park, MD
- 2004-05 Pilot Teacher, Reginald F. Lewis Museum, Baltimore, MD

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION/MEMBERSHIPS

- 2002-Pres. National Educators Association (NEA)
- 2002-Pres. Prince George's County Educator Association (PGCEA)
- 2005-Pres. Southern Maryland Art League

EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *My Beautiful*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in interdisciplinary Art
Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA at
Harmony Hall Regional Center, Ft. Washington, MD
- 2010 *In Honor of: Celebrate Women*, Surratts-Clinton Library, Clinton, MD
- 2009 *Art in Spring*, Harmony Hall Regional Center, Ft. Washington, MD
- 2008 *Artist-Teacher-Student*, The Congressional Schools of VA, Falls Church,
VA